

ENGL 3676: Representing Gender and Sexuality in Literature (cross-listed with WMNS 3676)

## **Feminist Literature and Colonial Science: Healers, Herbalists, and Poets**

Course: MTWR 9:50-11:30, Summer 1, 2018

Instructor: Liz Polcha

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Office hours: T/TH 11:45 AM -1:15 PM

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### **Overview:**

When we think of the terms “colonial science” and “natural history,” we likely imagine European men in tricorn hats recording their newest medicinal or botanical discovery in commonplace books or almanacs. This course offers an alternate image of the colonial scientist, as depicted through the lens of 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century feminist, indigenous, and anticolonial authors, poets, and artists who remediate the history of science and medicine through their writings, art, and healing practices. Sitting at the intersection of ecofeminism, postcolonial feminism, and the history of science, the readings for this course challenge Eurocentric and colonial notions of scientific history, namely in botany, herbalism, medicine, reproductive health, and anatomy.



Throughout the semester, we will think about questions such as:

- Who has historically been seen as an authority on plants, medicine, healing in the Americas?
- Do literary genres such as fiction and poetry help revise a patriarchal and white supremacist history of science?
- Can we label traditional medicinal roles such as healers, midwives, and so-called “witches” as scientifically innovative?
- How does attention to gender, sexuality, and labor change the way we think about colonial science and natural history?
- Is there a queer history of colonial science?
- What does critical race theory teach us about the history of racial classification systems, eugenics, and phenotype charts?

In addition to in-class discussion, class participation will include a visit to Harvard’s Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, with the option of writing a feminist analysis of the museum for 5 points extra-credit.

### **Learning Goals:**

Both collectively and individually, students will:

- Develop a working definition of “colonial science” and an awareness of its many genres of print and visual production
- Explore the concept of feminist resistance through writing, thinking critically about theoretical terms like “decolonize” “patriarchy” “feminism” and “justice”
- Produce unique research-based arguments drawing from both course material and outside sources
- Construct informed and thoughtful responses to course readings, in both writing and in class discussion
- Help establish a classroom community environment that is attentive to inclusivity and respect

### **Required Texts to Acquire:**

- *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*, Maryse Condé (2009)
- Selected poetry, short stories, and secondary criticism in pdf format on Blackboard (See below schedule)

### **Suggested Texts to Acquire (we will be reading excerpts on PDF format):**

- *An Indigenous People's History of the United States*, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz (2014)
- *The History of White People*, Nell Irvin Painter (2010)
- *Survivance Vol. III Indigenous Poesis*, R.I.S.E: Radical Indigenous Survivance & Empowerment (2017) – available for purchase here: <https://www.etsy.com/shop/DemianDineyazhi>.

#### Assignments and Course Breakdown:

**20% In-class Presentations:** Each student will be required to give two critically driven fifteen-minute presentations on assigned secondary source readings (scholarly articles and chapters) throughout the course of the semester, which go beyond merely summarizing the author's argument. We will sign up for these presentations during the first day of class.

**25% Mid-term research project:** This assignment asks students to conduct research on a contemporary feminist cultural text that engages with the concept of healing and/or collective care. The "cultural text" could be: a zine, a book of poetry, a guidebook, an herbalist shop, a community workshop, a tumblr page, or an activist group. For a few local examples, see [Haus Witch](#), [Good Fight Herbs](#), [W.I.T.C.H Boston](#), [Healing Justice](#). Dimensions: 6-7 pages, double-spaced, times new roman 12 pt font, in addition to a Works Cited page. MLA format. Submitted in .docx.

**15% Blackboard posts:** Throughout the semester, you will write three 500 word blog posts responding to the primary source course readings (fiction, poetry, photography), due by class time. Posts should offer your critical insight into the reading and avoid plot summary. Your posts should also engage with the thoughts, ideas, and comments of your peers, either from in-class discussion or from Blackboard posts.

**15% Participation:** Regular course attendance and participation in course discussion and in-class activities. This includes designated time for in-class writing and research, and a field trip to the Peabody Museum.

**25% Final Research Project:** This final project requires that you construct a research-based argument drawing from at least 2-3 readings (either primary or secondary) from our syllabus in addition to 2-3 outside sources. Dimensions: Projects can follow the format of a research essay (see requirements for the mid-term assignment), or, multi-media projects (such as comics, zines, websites, performances) will be considered with approval from the instructor. Students will present their final project to the class at the end of the semester.

#### Course Policies:

##### Engaged Participation and Attendance:

- Regular attendance and participation are required. During the summer sessions, students are allowed two unexcused absences. Significant and/or frequent tardiness will be counted as unexcused absences, as three tardies equals one unexcused absence. Students also have the right to a limited number of excused absences due to a religious observance, illness, death in the family, required participation in athletic events, or other serious and unavoidable life circumstances. Students are responsible for notifying their instructor when they must miss class for any reason. Instructors are responsible for determining whether a student will be excused from the class. Instructors are reminded that University Health and Counseling Services will not issue documentation of students' illnesses or injuries.
- Each class you will be asked to participate, either in larger class discussions or in small groups. Participation also means completing short assignments, listening respectfully to classmates and to me, taking turns talking (i.e., not "hogging the spotlight") and finding appropriate ways to disagree with someone (or the text itself!). If you are shy or uncomfortable speaking in front of others, come talk to me about strategies you can use. Remember, you must come to class with your assigned reading in hand (either printed out or on your laptop or tablet), having completed said reading before class.

**Late Submissions of Written Work:**

- I will subtract a letter grade for each day that your work is late (including weekends). This means that if you turn in your assignment two days late, the highest grade you will be able to receive is an 80%. If you have an emergency, please contact me as soon as possible about receiving an extension. However, be forewarned that I rarely allow extensions and usually require documentation in order to issue them.

**Policy for Submitting Assignments:**

- All major writing assignments will be turned in through email (Polcha.e@husky.neu.edu), and in MLA format (times new roman, 12 pt. font, 1 inch margins, .doc or .docx format). Please retain digital copies of everything you write for this class, including draft work.

**please save your work in this format: Section, last name, abbreviated title of assignment. For example: 3676\_Polcha\_Project1**

**Grading Scale and Policies:**

94-100 = A

90-93 = A-

87-89 = B+

84-86 = B

80-83 = B-

77-79 = C+

74-76 = C

70-73 = C-

67-69 = D+

64-66 = D

60-63 = D-

0-59 = F

**Academic Integrity:**

Northeastern University is committed to the principles of intellectual honesty and integrity: the NU Academic Honesty and Integrity Policy is found at <http://www.northeastern.edu/osccr/academicintegrity/index.html#Guidelines>. The Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution web site (<http://www.osccr.neu.edu/>) provides extensive information on student conduct, the disciplinary process, and the range of available sanctions. All members of the Northeastern community are expected to maintain complete honesty in all academic work, presenting only that which is their own work in tests and assignments. In English classes, this definition of plagiarism applies not only to borrowing whole documents, but also to borrowing parts of another's work without proper acknowledgment and proper paraphrasing or quotation. We will discuss effective and responsible use of sources throughout the semester.

**Policy of Respect and Care:**

Disruptive language and disruptive behavior is not welcome in this class. Disruptive language includes, but is not limited to, violent and/or belligerent and/or insulting remarks, including sexist, racist, homophobic, transphobic or anti-ethnic slurs, bigotry, and disparaging commentary, either spoken or written.

While I do not disagree that you each have a right to your own opinions, inflammatory language founded in ignorance or hate is unacceptable. Please remember that all writing you complete for this course is public writing. This means that your audience is not just your instructor, but your classmates as well. When sharing your ideas and writing in class, treat your classmates and your instructor the way you would like to be treated—with respect and care; this starts with self-respect and care.